



## Activists Rally Against 'Food Desert' in Downtown Brooklyn

By Jose Alcoff  
December 23, 2009

Decrying the willful creation of what public housing residents call a food desert, marchers took to the streets of Myrtle Ave. last Tuesday afternoon providing a portrait of how gentrification depletes a community's resources for the working class, and builds up those priced for the well-to-do.

Families United for Racial & Economic Equality (FUREE), based in Brooklyn's downtown and Fort Greene neighborhoods, brought out supporters to demand affordable and fresh grocery options, and the jobs supporters say should come with them. The march was scheduled to coincide with the release of a report by FUREE and the Urban Justice Center titled "Food Fight: Expanding Access to Affordable and Healthy Food in Downtown Brooklyn," detailing how gentrification has swept affordable grocery stores out of downtown in favor of towers made up of condominiums. The report also says that the developer responsible for this, John Catismidis, plans to open a new grocery store near the demolished one, but one whose prices would be out of the range of residents of the Ingersoll and Whitman public housing developments.

Local residents criticized the local grocery options as either rife with rotten produce and meat or far too expensive. They were accompanied at the mic by a representative of the United Food and Commercial Workers who joined in the demand for decent jobs, a local businessman who promised to try to employ more workers from the community, neighbors planning the creation of the Greene-Hill Food Co-op, and City Councilwoman Letitia James of the 35th District.

"Who wants this garlic and cheese baguette?" James shouted on a sidewalk standing between Ingersoll public housing and the site of the new upscale grocery. "Why, right now it's easier to find a gun than a baguette around here."

Among those leading the chants was Valery Jean, who is shortly taking over as FUREE Executive Director from the outgoing Ilana Berger.